

## Patriarchal Dominance in English Literature

Shubhangi M. Hiwarkhedka<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Anshu Sharma<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Department of English, Shri Jagdishprasad Jhabarmal Tibrewala University, Vidyanagari, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, India.

**Emails Id:** shubhangi.joshi222@gmail.com<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

*Patriarchal dominance has been a prevalent theme in English literature throughout its history. Many literary works reflect and critique the societal norms and power structures that have historically favored men over women. Patriarchal norms prescribe rigid gender roles and expectations for men and women, reinforcing stereotypes and inequalities. Women are often relegated to traditional roles as caregivers, homemakers, and subordinate members of the family, while men are expected to be the primary breadwinners and decision-makers. These gender roles perpetuate unequal power dynamics and limit women's autonomy and agency. Prominent examples include Shakespeare's plays, where gender roles and power imbalances are often central to the plot, and classic novels like Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice," which explores women's limited options in a patriarchal society. Over time, literature has evolved to challenge and subvert these patriarchal norms, with authors like Virginia Woolf and Charlotte Perkins Gilman addressing issues of gender inequality and women's autonomy. Feminist literature and criticism have also played a significant role in analyzing and deconstructing patriarchal themes in English literature. Patriarchal dominance, characterized by the historical and societal power imbalance that favors men over women, has been a recurring theme in English literature throughout the ages. This theme reflects and critiques the prevailing gender norms, roles, and inequalities that have persisted within different periods and cultures of English-speaking societies. From early literary works to contemporary literature, patriarchal dominance remains a complex and enduring subject of exploration.*

**Keywords:** Women, Men, Patriarchal, Dominance, Gender, Societal.

### 1. Introduction

This research paper focus on Patriarchal dominance which has been a pervasive and enduring theme in the landscape of English literature, spanning centuries of literary output. This theme reflects the historical and cultural context in which many works were written, where societal norms and power structures favored men over women.

#### 1.1 Historical Context

In ancient Greek and Roman literature, works such as Homer's "The Iliad" and "The Odyssey" depicted male heroes as central figures while often relegating women to secondary roles. The stories of Penelope and Helen illustrate how women were portrayed primarily as objects of desire or as symbols of virtue and chastity. English literature, such as during the Elizabethan era, playwrights like William Shakespeare often depicted patriarchal dominance prominently in his works.

### 2. Shakespeare's Exploration of Patriarchal Dominance

In plays like "Macbeth" and "Othello," Shakespeare explored the consequences of unchecked male ambition and the subjugation of women. Female characters were frequently portrayed as victims of patriarchal control or as transgressors who defied gender norms, like Lady Macbeth. Certainly! In plays like "Macbeth" and "Othello," William Shakespeare delved into the theme of unchecked male ambition, showcasing how a character's unrestrained desire for power or success can lead to their downfall. Additionally, Shakespeare also examined the subjugation of women in these plays [1-3]. In "Othello," the character of Desdemona is subjected to the controlling and manipulative behavior of her husband, Othello, which ultimately results in a tragic outcome. This highlights the

societal norms and expectations of the time, where women were often seen as subservient to men and lacked agency in their own lives. During the 18th and 19th centuries, the novels of authors like Jane Austen provided incisive commentary on the limitations women faced in patriarchal societies.

### **2.1 Austen's Critique of Patriarchal Societies**

Works like "Pride and Prejudice" and "Sense and Sensibility" examined the social and economic constraints on women's choices and marriage prospects, highlighting the dependence on male relatives. Jane Austen's [4] novels "Pride and Prejudice" and "Sense and Sensibility" provide insightful examinations of the social and economic constraints placed on women during the Regency era in England. These novels emphasize the limited choices and marriage prospects women faced, underscoring their dependence on male relatives for financial security and social status. In "Pride and Prejudice," the Bennet sisters, particularly the protagonist Elizabeth Bennet, are confronted with the pressure to marry well due to the limited inheritance rights of women. [5] Their mother's desperation to find them suitable husbands highlights the economic necessity of marriage for women of their social class. The character of Charlotte Lucas, who marries Mr. Collins for financial stability, further exemplifies this theme. Similarly, "Sense and Sensibility" explores the economic vulnerabilities of its female characters, such as Elinor and Marianne Dashwood. The Dashwood sisters must navigate societal expectations and financial dependence on male relatives after their father's death. Elinor's pragmatic approach and Marianne's emotional journey provide contrasting perspectives on coping with these constraints. Both novels offer a critical commentary on the limitations placed on women's autonomy and the importance of securing a suitable marriage for economic stability. [6] Austen's works continue to be celebrated for their astute portrayal of the societal norms and challenges faced by women in the 19th century.

### **2.2 Emergence of Feminist Literature**

The 19th century also saw the emergence of feminist literature, with Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein"

offering a critique of the destructive consequences of male ambition. Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre" featured a strong-willed heroine who sought independence in a world dominated by men. Moving into the 20th century, authors like Virginia Woolf challenged patriarchal norms more explicitly. In her essay [7] "A Room of One's Own," Woolf argued for the importance of economic and intellectual independence for women writers. Woolf also discusses the lack of female representation in literature and the challenges women writers faced in a male-dominated literary tradition. Through her exploration of these themes, Woolf makes a compelling case for the need for greater gender equality and opportunities for women in the world of literature and beyond. While it may not have traditional characters, "A Room of One's Own" is a thought-provoking and influential work that addresses important issues related to women's roles and representation. Simultaneously, feminist literature and criticism gained momentum, analyzing and deconstructing the portrayal of women in literature and calling attention to the need for gender equality. While strides have been made towards greater gender equality in both literature and society, the legacy of patriarchal dominance continues to inform contemporary literary works.

### **3. Contemporary Relevance**

"The God of Small Things" by Arundhati Roy has been analyzed from various feminist perspectives. One prominent feminist reading of the novel focuses on the portrayal of gender roles and the oppression faced by the female characters in the story, particularly Ammu and Mammachi. The novel critiques traditional patriarchal norms and societal expectations that limit the agency and freedom of women. Authors like Margaret Atwood, [8] in "The Handmaid's Tale," explore dystopian worlds where women's rights are severely restricted, serving as a stark reminder of the ongoing relevance of this theme. "The Handmaid's Tale" by Margaret Atwood is a powerful exploration of dystopian worlds where women's rights are profoundly curtailed, serving as a stark reminder of the enduring relevance of this theme. In the novel's totalitarian society of Gilead, women are stripped of their autonomy and reduced

to roles solely defined by their reproductive abilities. They become "handmaids," forced to bear children for the ruling class, highlighting the extreme control over their bodies and lives. Women in Gilead are denied access to education, employment, and agency, reflecting the dire consequences of gender-based oppression. Atwood's work has resonated with readers for its chilling portrayal of how societies can regress into oppressive systems, even in the modern era. It serves as a warning about the fragility of women's rights and the importance of safeguarding gender equality. "The Handmaid's Tale" continues to be relevant in discussions about women's rights, reproductive freedom, and the potential consequences of extremist ideologies, making it a powerful and thought-provoking piece of dystopian literature.

### **3.1 De Beauvoir's Analysis**

In "The Second Sex," Simone de Beauvoir explores the lived experiences of women and the societal constructs that have led to women's subordination and oppression. The title itself, "The Second Sex," alludes to the idea that women have historically been treated as the "second" or subordinate sex in relation to men, a concept deeply embedded in patriarchal societies. De Beauvoir argues that women have been historically defined as the "Other" in relation to men, leading to their marginalization and objectification. She examines how this bothering process has been perpetuated through language, culture, and societal norms. De Beauvoir explores the intersection of women's sexuality and their role in reproduction. She argues that women's sexuality has been historically defined in terms of male desire and that women's reproductive functions have been used to justify their subordination. As an existentialist philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir applies existentialist principles to the analysis of women's experiences. She emphasizes the importance of individual freedom and self-determination in the pursuit of an authentic existence, and she critiques how societal constraints limit women's ability to achieve this authenticity. De Beauvoir's work also discusses the possibilities for women's liberation and the need for women to

assert their agency and challenge the status quo. She advocates for women to transcend the limitations placed on them by society and to strive for independence and self-realization. widespread debate and discussion when it were first published and remains relevant to contemporary feminist discourse. It has influenced subsequent generations of feminist thinkers and has had a profound impact on feminist theory, gender studies, and the broader fields of philosophy and literature. Simone de Beauvoir's analysis of women's oppression and her call for women's liberation continue to resonate with those seeking to understand and address issues of gender inequality and patriarchy.

### **Conclusion**

The theme of patriarchal dominance in English literature is a multifaceted and evolving subject that has been explored and critiqued across different periods and genres. It reflects the broader societal struggles for gender equality and remains a rich area of literary analysis and discussion. Indian English literature has continually grappled with the theme of patriarchal dominance, offering a diverse range of perspectives and narratives that shed light on the complexities of gender dynamics in India. It not only reflects the struggles faced by women but also contributes to the broader discourse on gender equality and social change. The theme of patriarchal dominance, offering a diverse range of perspectives and narratives that shed light on the complexities of gender dynamics. It not only reflects the struggles faced by women but also contributes to the broader discourse on gender equality and social change.

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